

Remarks on the COVID-19 Response and National Vaccination Efforts
October 14, 2021

The President. Good afternoon. I've just been briefed by my COVID-19 team on the progress we're making on our fight against the virus. Today I want to provide a brief update on my plan that I announced in early September to accelerate the path out of this pandemic.

It's working. We're making progress. Nationally, daily cases are down 47 percent; hospitalizations are down 38 percent over the past 6 weeks. Over the past 2 weeks, most of the country has improved as well. Case rates are declining in 39 States, and hospital rates are declining in 38 States. We're down to 66 million—it's still an unacceptably high number—of unvaccinated people from almost 100 million in July.

That's important. It's important progress. But it's not—now is not the time to let up. We have a lot more to do. We're in a very critical period as we work to turn the corner on COVID-19.

First, we have to do more to vaccinate the 66 million unvaccinated people in America. It's essential. The vaccine requirements that we started rolling out in the summer are working. They're working.

The Labor Department is going to soon be issuing an emergency rule for companies with a hundred or more employees to implement vaccination requirements in their—among their workforce. Every day, we see more businesses implementing vaccination requirements, and the mounting data shows that they work. Businesses and organizations that are implementing requirements are seeing their vaccination rates rise by an average of 20 percent or more to well over 90 percent—the number of employees vaccinated.

Let's be clear: Vaccination requirements should not be another issue that divides us. That's why we continue to battle the misinformation that's out there, and companies and communities are setting up their—stepping up as well to combat these—the misinformation. Southwest Airlines at—the head of the pilot—the head of the pilot's union and its CEO dismissed critics who claim vaccination mandates contributed to flight disruptions. School board members, religious leaders, and doctors across the country are fighting misinformation and educating people about the importance of vaccines. All of these efforts are going to help us continue moving the dial to eliminate this disease.

Second, we're going to continue protecting the vaccinated. This work—this week, the Food and Drug Administration and—the FDA is reviewing data on Moderna and Johnson and Johnson boosters. We expect a final decision from the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, in the next couple of weeks. If they authorize the boosters, which will be strictly made based on the science—that decision will be based on the science—this will mean all three vaccines will be available for boosters.

Already, more than one out of three eligible seniors have gotten their third shot, the booster. And we're going to continue to provide that additional protection to seniors and others as we head into the holidays. These boosters are free. I'll say it again: They're free, available, and convenient to get.

Third point I'd like to make: We need to continue to keep our schools and our students safe. Ninety-six percent of school districts are fully open with children back in the classroom and—for in-person learning. We have been able to do this because we've provided our schools the resources they need to protect children and the educators, as well as the staff that works in the

schools. We've been encouraging schools to implement important health measures like masking, testing, and getting everyone vaccinated who is eligible to be vaccinated.

Now, I know parents out there are anxiously waiting for a vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. The good news is, the FDA and outside experts from the CDC are set to make its determination as to whether the vaccine will be authorized for that age range in the next few weeks. If authorized, we are ready. We have purchased enough vaccines for all children between the ages of 5 and 11 in the United States. And we'll be—it will be convenient for parents to get their children vaccinated at trusted locations, and families will be able to sleep easier at night knowing their kids are protected as well.

Let me close with this: The plan I laid out in September is working. We're headed in the right direction. We have critical work to do, but we can't let up now. My team and I are doing everything we can. But I'm calling on more businesses to step up. I'm calling on more parents to get their children vaccinated when they are eligible. And I'm asking everyone—everyone who hasn't gotten vaccinated: Please get vaccinated.

That's how we put this pandemic behind us and accelerate our economic recovery. We can do this.

I've said many times: God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, have you decided on an FDA Commissioner?

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible]—sir?

Q. Mr. President, what's your message to the John Deere workers on strike?

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:54 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Casey A. Murray, president, Southwest Airlines Pilots Association; and Gary C. Kelly, chairman of the board and chief executive officer, Southwest Airlines Co.

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